Satnam | Shri | Waheguru

Dhan Guru Nanak

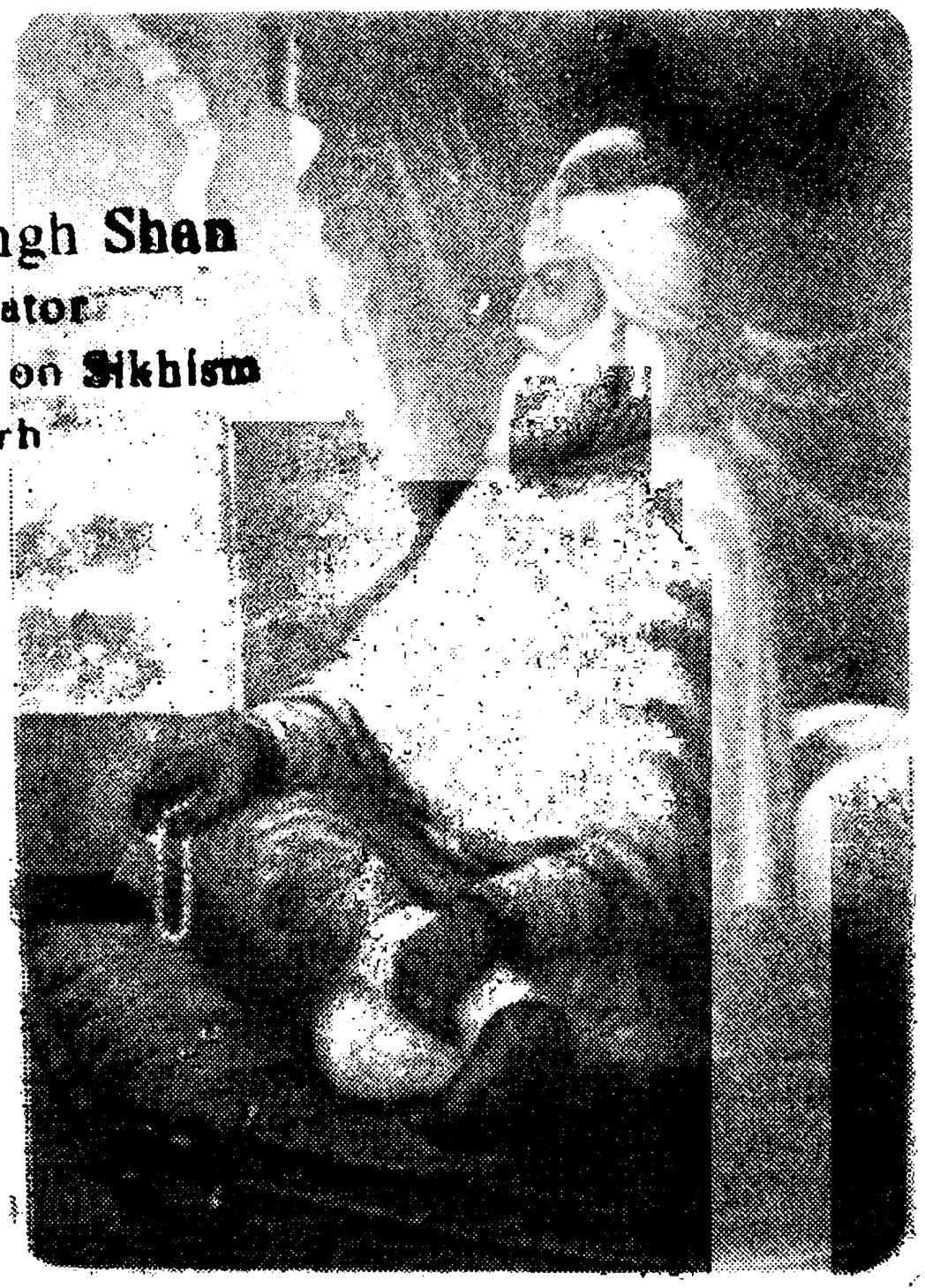
Dhan Guru Nanak

"ਅਰਾਧ ਏਕੰਕਾਰ ਸਾਚਾ ਨਿਤ ਦੇਇ ਚੜੇ ਸੁਵਾਇਆ"

BRIEF HISTORY PATRIARCH OF SIKH RAJ

SHRI HAZUR BABA SAHIB SINGH JI BEDI

(11th in lineage from Baba Nanak) Una Sahib



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GUR-BANSAWALI

SHRI GURU NANK DEV JI

- Baba Shri Chand Ji (Founder of Udasin Samparda)
- Baba Lakhmi Dass Ji
  - Baba Dharam Chand Ji
    - Baba Manak Chand Ji
      - Baba Datar Chand Ji
        - Baba Gurdit Chand Ji
        - Baba Pahar Chand Ji
          - Baba Harikaran Chand Ji
            - Baba Nihal Chand Ji
              - Baba Kaladhari Ji
                - Baba Kuir Singh Ji
                - Baba Dharam Singh Ji
                - Baba Ajit Singh Ji
                - Baba Sagar Chand Ji
                - Baba Avtar Chand Ji
              - Baba Lajja Dhari Ji
            - Baba Harjas Ji
          - Baba Mansa Chand Ji
        - Baba Tara Chand Ji
        - Baba Fateh Chand Ji
        - Baba Uday Chand Ji
          - Baba Asa Chand Ji
          - Baba Suraj Chand Ji
            - Baba Deep Chand Ji
            - Baba Shivdev Ji
      - Baba Jagat Chand Ji
      - Baba Hans Raj Ji
      - Baba Anayat Chand Ji
    - Baba Mehar Chand Ji

SHRI HAZUR BABA SAHIB SINGH JI 'BEDI'

- Shri Baba Bishan Singh Ji
  - Shri Attar Singh Ji
  - Shri Baba Khem Singh Ji
- Shri Baba Teg Singh Ji
- Shri Hazur Baba Bikaram Singh Ji
  - Shri Hazur Baba Sujan Singh Ji
  - Shri Hazur Baba Ram Kishan Singh Ji
  - Shri Hazur Baba Davinder Singh Ji
  - Shri Hazur Baba Madhusudan Singh Ji
  - Shri Hazur Baba Sarabjot Singh Ji (Present Gaddi Nashin)
    - Tikka Amarjot Singh Ji
    - Kanwar Karam Jot Singh Ji

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INTRODUCTION

The History of Punjab abounds with a number of well known luminous—personalities, but one of the most important figures of Sikh history, the Venerable Patriarch of the Sikh Panth, whose lineage is traced to Baba Nanak himself, Baba Sahib Bedi has been ignored and his services in building the Khalsa Raj undermined for reasons best known to the leaders and writers of sikh history. There are a number of old manuscripts, and historical books that tell us of the legendary stories surrounding Baba Sahib Singh. They recount tales and incidences that reveal a man who upheld the values of truth, justice, courage, fairplay, tolerance and wisdom which are the hallmarks of the greatest of civilisation.

Yet, a question that most of the present generation still ask on hearing his name is—Who was Baba Sahib Singh ? It is difficult to answer the query in one word ; that he was a religious leader, a saint, a brave soldier or a great statesman. For he was all these and much more. What is it that sets apart man from other animals? It is his conscience, his inner spirituality, the ability to tell the right from wrong, Baba Sahib Singh was the "conscience Keeper" of the Sikh Nation. Fearless he bowed before no king other than that king of kings, the Akal Purukh. He could admonish the Sikh Chieftians when they strayed from the right path and advise them in their hour of crisis. That they heeded his advice goes to show the esteem that he was held in. In this he was not only helped by the fact that he was a direct descendant of Baba Nanak (11th generation) but was also a great saint in himself.

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Contemporary writers held him in great reverence and went to the extent of addressing him as "Satguru" in their writings which was contrary to his own belief that no mortal could be equivalated to the Gurus or to the Holy Guru Granth Sahib. It is for this reason that a treasury of valuable historical literature like "Bir Mrigesh Granth" by Pandit Sher Singh, "Gur Bilas Baba Sahib Singh ji" by Bhai Shoba Ram. "Gur Bilas Baba Sahib Singh ji" by Bhai Lala Ram of Sewa Panthi Sampreda lies buried in the sands of time. Many writers of the pre Singh Sabha movement used to address contemporary Saints or religious leaders as 'Guru' out of personal reverence but this was against the orthodox Sikh tenets. So these valuable books were put on the back shelves, untouhed by the modern writers, inspite of the wealth of information, moral message and history they contain. A case of "throwing the baby away with the bath water !"

His high stature in the Sikh Panth is evident from the fact that when Maharaja Ranjit Singh was to be coronated, it was Baba Sahib Singh who was called upon to perform the ardas, apply the "tilak" on his forehead and confer on him the title "Va Fazley Akal, Khadimay Qaum, Valiye Khalsa Sarkar, Shere -e-Punjab Maharaja Ranjit Singh at Lahore on the Baisakhi day in 1801

As arbitretor his nobility inspired much confidence and his saintliness helped to disarm warring factions and bring about peace in bloodless judgements. As in the case of 'Bhangi Sardars uprising against Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Another instance is the one, when all other means having failed, it was only through the auspicies of Baba Sahib Singh that Maharaja Ranjit Singh was able to resolve the diplomatic crisis that had arisen when Akali Phoola Singh, defying the 'Treaty' of Amritsar settled in the British territory of Anandpur Sahib.

I am grateful to Principal Satbir Singh for undertaking research on Baba Sahib Singh, Giani Isher Singh 'Nara' for his prolific writings,

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Sh. Harnam Dass 'Sehrai' and Dr. Gurmukh Singh of Punjabi University Patiala for their efforts in throwing some light on Baba Sahib Singh's life and-times. As a lot of sikh history pertaining to the sikh Raj still remains hidden from the sikhs of today. I am willing to extend them all possible assistance. This is the least I can do in gratitude for the previlege that Satguru has bestown on me of being his great grandson. In our own small way we, his family, have tried to live upto the hukam (order) given to them by Guru Gobind Singh himself "jitti Nav Khand Medhni, Satnam da chakar Phiraya."

Baba Sarbjot Singh Bedi

Present Gaddi Nasin

(Grandson of Baba Sahib Singh Bedi of UNA sahib.)

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THE GREAT PERSONALITY OF THE SIKH PANTH

-BABA SAHIB SINGH JI BEDI

BY PRINCIPAL SATBIR SINGH

TRANSLATED BY PRINCIPAL HARNAM SINGH WADHWA.

In accordance with the Sikh tradition, a 'Guruwak' was invoked from the Holy Guru Granth Sahib to name the new-born son of Baba Ajit Singh. History tells us that the Guruwak 'Sahib Hoye Dayal' ordained that the child be named Sahib Singh. But I feel that the true lord indeed showed his benediction to the Sikh Panth in sending this great personality to lead the nation. Sir Lepel Griffin calls Babaji a prominent man who added lustre to the Bedi clan but this was an error of judgement. Babaj was such a towering personality that not only was he able to guide the Sikh Panth through every crisis but made it possible for Maharaja Ranjit Singht to bring all the warring factions of the Sikhs under one banner. "Saarey gehney bhan kay ik hans Gharhvaya". Had it been left to Baba Sahib Singh, the English could never have consolidated their hold in Ludhiana and would have remained in Aligarh beyond Delhi.

Baba Sahib Singh was born in 1756, the time when Abdali was preparing to launch his fourth invasion (November 1756) on India. Punjab had not yet forgotten the atrocities of Mir Manu when Abdali started his devastating assaults. The Sikh nation was defending every attack under the leadership of Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. Abdali crushed the Marathas so decisively in the battle field of Panipat, that they could not recoup for twenty years. But when he gave a severe blow to the Sikhs on 5th February 1762 in the Kup battle-field, many thought that the Sikh nation may never recover after this holocaust. But the World witnessed and historians testify that after just three months the Sikh Jathas had overtaken Abdali and attacked his camps repeatedly at Lahore. This made Abdali so nervous that he gave up his killing sprees and resorted to divisive policies instead. But the Sikh sect had been

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schooled in the tradition of Guru Gobind Singh.

When Abdali sent the Royal Command of subedari, a shawl of honour and dry fruit from Kabul to S. Gujjar Singh Bhangi, he, in turn, sent a ragged, coarse, brown shawl, some turnips, parched grams and a piece of paper with 'Singh Hoi Raakha Kim Kaan, Airey Gairey ka Mannai Furmaan,' written on it.

By this he meant that we prefer ragged coarse shawls to your Afghan rugs, the turnips of our land are like apples and we love parched grams more than your dry fruit. The sikhs have received their authority from the Lord Almighty Himself and they needed no royal command from any ordianry person. After Abdali, his son, Taimur dared not invade Punjab. When his Muslim brethren tried to persuade him to do so, Taimur wrote back "What did my father gain by attacking the Sikhs ?" At that time (1773-1783 A.D.) the Sikhs were virtually the masters of the region. They expected no Afghan invasion from the West and the English were still scheming in the far East. The Marathas were still licking their wounds. The Rajputs were almost non-existent. The Mughals, descendents of Aurangzeb had literally drowned themselves in cups of wine. Had the Sikh sects(Misals) been united under one banner they would have been the Masters of the county. But chaos was the order of the day. Previously, fear of external attack had kept them united. In its absence, there was need of a strong inner spiritual force. Baba Sahib Singh provided this force which saved the nation from breaking into fragments.

Baba Sahib Singh had not only read the Guru Granth Sahib and its interpretation with all the annotations in his early years but had also studied the entire Sikh history and Puranic mythology. He took up the responsibility of reviving National traditions. He realized that political turmoil and hostile forces had cherished values and there was little reverence for shabad Bani amongst the masses. To take Pahul, (Amrit) he went to Anandpur sahib himself and inspired the people to do

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likewise. After strengthening the roots of sikhism in the hilly regions he turned his attention to the plains. He, then reached Amritsar where he emphasised the importance of 'Kirtan' (devotional music). He organised jathas of 'Rababis and' and one of thses always accompanied him as he went from village to village to preach. Whenever he came across a charlatan he would expose his hypocrisy and urge him to give up manmat and follow the path of 'Gurmat'. Along with simran, (prayer), Kirtan (singing of devotional hymns) and Naam (recitation of the True Name) he stressed the importance of service. Once he cast into fire, the wood of the doors and window frames of his house, in order to prepare langer (food) for some visiting sants (holy men) and thus demonstrated practically the verse of Baba Farid : 'Jey main Honda Waria Mitta Arhiya Heran Jaley Majeeth Jion Uppar Angara'. For such qualities, he was held in high esteem by the sikhs and was venerated by all with the tittle 'Baba' or Patriarch. Whenever the Panth was in a state of dilemna he would give guidance and pull it out of crisis. He was a skilled swords man ; in case of an assault on honour, he would reach unaided to set matters right.

Baba Sahib Singh directed all his efforts in trying to find a suitable leader for the Panth who could form the Khalsa Raj (the government of the Pure) by wiping out the divisive frontiers amongst the Misals (clans). At last his discerning eye fell on the young Ranjit Singh. He was farsighted enough to judge that the boy possessed all the essential qualities of leader ship. Baba Prem Singh of Hoti Mardan has listed Babaji among the architecs of Khalsa Raj. But, in fact the Maharaja owed his very existence to Babaji. When S. Mahan Singh expired in 1792 A.D, - it was feared that his enemies, knowing Ranjit Singht to be just a child, might eliminate him. And plot they did. Baba Sahib Singh intervened and was able to foil the conspiracy. Blessing him, he prophesied that the young boy would become an eminent king one day and bring glory to the Sikh Panth.

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True to the prophecy, Maharaja Ranjit Singh challenged Shah Zaman at the early age of eighteen years. Shah Zaman was boasting inside the Royal Fort at Lahore,"I have seen these Sikhs who take to their heels at the very sound of my horses hoofbeats" . "When Ranjit Singh heard this, he made straight for the Suman Burj with only Twenty horsemen. He fired some rounds and challenged Shah Zaman in these words." "O grandson of Ahmad Shah Abdali ! Here is the grandson of Sardar Charat Singh, come out and cross steel with me". Munshi Sohan Lal writes, that there was no response from inside and Ranjit Singh returned but not without leaving his stamp of valour. Secure inside the fort, Shah Zaman was completely shaken. He sent his emissaries to Amritsar with the message that he was prepared to hand over Lahore and the Vice Royalty of Punjab to the Sikhs. On hearing this offer, many Sikh chieftains showed their willingness. Ranjit Singh, too, sent his counsel to Lahore. When Baba Sahib Singh learnt of this, he was very angry. He, at once, reached Lahore, collected the Sikh Sardars and chided them. He recalled the Sikh History in these words : "You should be ashamed of yourselves. you beg from him, who is himself so afraid of your might ? Who has taught you this path of servility ? O Sikh Chiefs, since when have you become beggars ? The Khalsa never begs, he conquers with his might. Where is your self-respect ? The Khalsa belongs to the Supreme One and he begs from none other." When Shah Zaman's emissary approached him, Babaji said on behalf of all the Sikh Sardars, "Tell Shah Zaman that this land belongs to us. He should retreat to his own land. We have conquered Punjab with the sword and we will protect it with its might too." When Shah Zaman heard this he was quite agitated and he threatened to teach the Sikhs a lesson. But this was mere bluster. Actually he was in a hurry to return to his own country. His brother Mahmud was fomenting trouble in Afghanistan and the army was becoming mutinous due to non payment of wages. He left, threatening to return soon after dealing with his brother Mahmud.

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Return, he did, but twelve years later, after his brother had taken away the light of his eyes, to seek refuge from Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He came, not with weapons but a walking stick, not with forces but with a plea. Baba Sahib Singh's able leadership saved the dignity of the Sikhs as well as of the Punjab.

Similarly, Shah Zaman, threw out feelers from Kabul to the Bhangi Sardars to win them over. The Bhangi Sardars were ready to fight with Ranjit Singh and were waiting for Shah Zaman in 1801. Baba Sahib Singh thought that the reprimand he had given at Lahore would suffice. He set out to try and unify the trans-sutlej Sikh States. He felt that if George Thomas was not checked, the territory beyond Sutlej would be lost to the Sikhs. The Sikh Chiefs sought help from General Peron. He demanded a part of Punjab in lieu of this help. The Sikh Sardars were willing when this news got to Baba Sahib Singh he stopped them from taking such a step and asked them to rely on their own strength. 'United we stand' saying this, he urged the Sikh States to resist Thomas, under one flag. It goes to the crdit of Babaji that he revived in the Sikh States the bond of Sikh brotherhood. But he was still involved in bringing about this unity when news came that the rift between the Bhangi Sardars and Maharaja Ranjit Singh had taken a serious turn. The agitated Bhangi Sardars were in favour of accepting the overlordship of Shah Zaman. Baba Sahib Singh immediately left for Gujrat and fearlessly stood between the antagonists. On seeing Babaji Ranjit Singh lay down his sword in front of him, and stood before silently. So luminous was his face and such was the effect of his personality that all the defiant Sardars too, stripped themselves of their swords and placed them before Babaji. Munshi Sohan Lal writes that all the swords kept lying there for about an hour. None dared lay his hand on any of the swords. At last, Babaji took his own sword and fastened it to Ranjit Singh's waist and blessing him, said, that he would soon be the Maharaja of Punjab. There was no dissent, and the day of coronation was fixed then and there.

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On the Baisakhi of 1801, in the Royal Fort of Lahore, Babaji himself performed the 'Ardasa', blessed Ranjit Singh with the title Singh Sahib, the Maharaja and annointed his forehead with Kesar. Slogans of Sat Sri Akal filled the air. How deeply influenced Maharaja Ranjit Singh was by Baba Sahib Singh is evident from the Nanak Shahi Rupee and the paisa was called Nanak Shahi Paisa.

The verse approved to be minted on the coin was the same as the one on the seal of Baba Banda Singh. The verse was as follows :

'Deg Teg Fateh, Nusrat Bedrang,

Yafat Az Nanak Guru Gobind Singh'

All the coinage minted that day was given away in charity. A point to make note of is that though Maharaja Ranjit Singh was a soverign, he did not agree to wear a crown nor did he get a throne made for himself. In fact, his personal seal, known as the Official Seal was engraved with the words 'Akal Sahai Ranjit Singh' like that of an ordinary Sardar or officer in his army. During negotiations or signing of treaties with other kingdoms, it was not the name Ranjit Singh, rather 'Khalsa Sarkar' (Government of the Pure ones) that was inscribed. Through Baba Sahib Singh it had been instilled in him that the foundaitons of Khalsa Raj were laid on Principles of equality. There was no such thing as a king and a subject in such a state. He should not take any step that would make him appear above the Khalsa Panth.

For almost a hundred years, the Gurudwaras had not been run by any organisation or system. Due to their neglect leaving aside a few, one could hardly find a trace of the Gurudwaras. Baba Sahib Singh had seen the dilapidated condition of the Gurudwaras during many of his sojourns and pilgrimages. He now asked the Maharaja to make these religious establishments self supportive. Maharaja Ranjit Singh attached a Jagir (land-deed) with almost every main Gurudwara and a monthly stipend

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was fixed for the smaller ones. When Baba Sahib Singh mentioned the need of a befitting Gurudwara at the birth place of Guru Nanak, the Maharaja said in a dramatic way that all the area that could be covered by Babaji on horse-back, riding from dawn to dusk, would be attached to the Gurudwara as Jagir. So at day break, after an early breakfast, Babaji mounted his horse and rode off to demarcate the area. He rode all day long, without alighting even once and returned just one hour before sunset. Babaji's endeavour was lauded by all and the Maharaja executed the lease deed of that area in the name of Gurudwara Janam Astahn (Nankana Sahib in Pakistan). According to one estimate he had covered almost 7500 hectares of land. Drawing attention to the care of Gurudwaras was one of the great contributions of Baba Sahib Singh.

When Baba Sahib Singh (in 1808) came to know that Mr. Metcalfe, an English diplomat, taking advantage of the strained relations between the states of Lahore and Patiala, was throwing feelers at the Sikh States to sign a treaty of such a nature that would permanently divide the Sikh Panth, he immediately contacted Maharaja Sahib Singh of Patiala and persuaded him to make peace with Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He made them exchage their turbans in his own presence (as a symbol of brotherhood) Mr. Metcalfe realised that his machinations would not succeed as long as Baba Sahib Singh was present and in the face of this show of unity ; he decided to bide his time. Subsequently, when Maharaja Ranjit singh left for Amritsar, Col. Ochterloney left Delhi and started intimidating the Sikh states again. While Amritsar was celebrating the union, the (southern) Sikh states signed an accord with the British under Minto. Upset, Maharaja Ranjit Singh was ready to take up arms against them but Baba Sahib Singh cautioned him that the clash would result only in blood shed amongst brothers and a battle with the British at that juncture would prove disastorus. Perforce a treaty had to be signed with the British. Maharaja Ranjit Singh spent many a sleepless night. Babaji was concerned. He reminded him that from time to time

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our Guru's sacrificed their lives, seven times, to overcome foreign tyrants however powerful or grand they may have been. The generous Guru endowed his bounty in the form of Amrit and enabled them to rule by transforming a cowardly race into the lion-hearted Singhs. But Alas ! these sikhs were frittering away, his precious Bounty so cheaply. They wanted to return to their old divisions of 'Jats', 'Jhiwars' and 'Nais'. They had not been able to preserve their Guru's heritage. Outwardly, they may appear to be the (Khalsa) true ones but they had turned into a wanton, adultrous and faithless people having left the 'Path of Guru' for a life of arrognace and vainglory. They were immersed in a life of pleasure-seeking and were fast becoming a decadent race. They had not the foresight to anticipate the onward march of the Bristish. By dividing themselves they had lost their honour and independence. This loss would be the cause of great suffering. At that time, Babaji's words of caution fell on deaf ears and the Sikh nations had to pass through many tribulations. In this age, too, the same advice needs to be conveyed to everyone so that the leaders may learn from it and guide the nation righteously.

Babaji could not remain a silent witness to any kind of wrong perpetrated on the honour of the sikhs. Once, while conducting a discourse in Amritsar, it was brought to his knowledge that the Chief of Raikot Salar Roshan Khan had enforced a ban on the holding of Shabad Kirtan (singing of hymns) and religious congregations. After completing the discourse, he exhorted the Sangat and mounting his horse left for Raikot at once. On his way he was joined by over 8000 Marjeevrey ('do or die" squads) who had heard of this heroic enterprise.

As soon as he reached Raikot, Babaji attacked with such force that the army of Roshan Khan buckled under it. He tried his best to muster his forces but Babaji fell upon him as a lion springs upon its prey. With a single stroke, he beheaded Salar Khan. Babji was now the master of this territory. But it was not for conquest that he had ventured forth. He had gone there merely to wrest for his brothers the right of freedom to worship. He, therefore, returned the captured terriotory to the salar's

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family. After that no one dared to interefere in the religious matters of the Sikhs.

This great man, an image of honour, warrior, RAAGI, lover of Kirtan, farsighted statesman, passed away in early 1834. Maharaja Ranjit Singh described his passing away as an irreparable loss to the nation.

Inspite of his prowess, following and high respect, Babaji was an embodiment of humility. There is a reference in history that in order to test him, a faqir named Harihar of Dadan Khan VIlage took up a higher position in his presence during a religious congregation, and then starting behaving in a manner which was objectionable to the sangat. Some attendants tried to force Hari Har to come down ; some even came armed with sticks. Seeing all this, Babaji said, "Do not use any force. The holy man is in his own state of mind. Let him sit where he pleases. Leave hime alone". Hari Har came down himself and said, "What I had only heard, I have now seen with my own eyes."

The "Sant Rattan Mala" mentions an incident, which shows how sharp was Babaji's insight. Bhai Vaste Ram went to Una Sahib to pay his respects to Baba Sahib Singh. There, he saw a Brahmin begging for money for his daughter's marriage. Just then, a Sikh Sardar came with an offering of five hundred ruppes and many other things for Babaji. Babaji refused to accept the offering. The Brahmin was peeved and he felt that Babaji could have passed the goods on to him, if he did not wish to keep them for himself. He even said these words aloud, but Babaji was firm in his refusal. Later, when Bhai Vasti Ram made his offering of a hundred rupees amongst other things, Babaji at once sent for the Brahmin. He gave him the money offered by Bhaiji and told him that Waheguru would be gracious with his blessings, for that was untainted money. Who cares today whether money is earned by fair means or foul ? Could it be that our downfall has come about because we live on the wages of sin ? Babaji did show us the Right path, but we have not been able to live up to it. May the gracious Once have mercy on us !

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   Edited By - Dr. Gurmukh Singh

(Punjabi University Publication Bureau, Patiala)

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4. principal Ganda Singh
5 .S. Khuswant Singh
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